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Ursula K. Le Guin's Quest for Tao in Her

Science Fiction and Fantasy World

厄秀拉·勒奎恩科幻世界的原道之旅

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Ph. D. Dissertation

**Ursula K. Le Guin's Quest for Tao in Her
Science Fiction and Fantasy World**

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Abstract

Among contemporary American writers, especially in the field of science fiction and fantasy, the name of Ursula K. Le Guin can never be ignored. Born in 1929, she has been writing for decades from last century to the present. She writes both poetry and prose, and in various modes including realistic fiction, science fiction, fantasy, young children's books, books for young adults, screenplays, literary criticisms, verbal texts for musicians, and voice texts. Up to now, she has published seven books of poetry, twenty-two novels, over a hundred short stories (collected in eleven volumes), four collections of essays, twelve books for children, and four volumes of translation. She also edited four anthologies including the influential *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (with Brian Attebery). Few American writers have done work of such high quality in so many forms. She has won nearly all the awards for science fiction and fantasy, nationally and internationally, including the top two—Hugo and Nebula—as well as the awards beyond the sphere of science fiction and fantasy, such as National Book Award and lifetime achievement awards of one kind or another. Famous literary critic Harold Bloom comments in the introduction to the collection of criticism on her masterpiece *The Left Hand of Darkness* with himself as the editor: “Better than Tolkien, far better than Doris Lessing, Le Guin is the overwhelming contemporary instance of a superbly imaginative creator and major stylist who chose (or was chosen by) ‘fantasy and science fiction’” (2). Japanese writer Haruki Murakami also says Le Guin has always been his favorite female writer.

Besides the above mentioned *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) which arouses attention for its depiction of androgynous life on an extraterrestrial planet, Le Guin's representative works also include the Earthsea Trilogy (1968-1972), later enlarged to a series of six fantasies about the growth and life stories of a young man with magic power, a utopian novel *The Dispossessed* (1974), a future historical novel about the west coast *Always Coming Home* (1985), influential edited anthology *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (with Brian Attebery) (1993), a translation of Taoist classic

Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way (1997) and most recently Locus Award winners *Lavinia* (2009) and *Cheek by Jowl* (2010), to name just a few.

Since science fiction was not so widely read in China until the late decades of the twentieth century, Le Guin's name was new to many Chinese readers. It was not until the 1980s that some of her stories and excerpts from her novels began to appear in science fiction and fantasy magazines and Chinese translation of her major works came out one another after 2000. But Le Guin has never been a stranger to Chinese culture, for she set out to read Lao Tzu at a very early age and Taoism has such an intensive influence on her that it goes throughout her writing career. The protagonists of Le Guin's work are no strangers to *Tao Te Ching* either: they struggle with the question of how to live properly in the world, how to work with others to create little countries without many people, working by not working to create ambiguous utopias, and how to achieve a harmonious life with nature. Many of her works are in fact commentaries on, and practice of, the Tao.

Taoism can be regarded as the guiding principle of Le Guin's major works, in terms of interpersonal relationship, social relationship and human-nature relationship respectively. In each of the relationships Taoist concepts are used to guide, understand and seek the ultimate balance and harmony. At the same time, Taoism in Le Guin's works finds collaboration with contemporary theories such as feminism and ecocriticism as well as provides interesting insights into Utopianism. The present dissertation tries to make a systematic study of Taoism in some of Le Guin's representative works by applying the theories accordingly.

This dissertation firstly gives a general survey of K. Le Guin's life and major works as well as her unique position in contemporary American literature. After reviewing Le Guin criticisms over the decades and science fiction as a literary genre, mentioning its history and development in the twentieth century, I bring forth that Taoism is an everlasting central element in Le Guin's writing and it deserves intensive research in the study of Le Guin's works.

A feminist study of the female roles Luz in *The Eye of the Heron*, Tenar's growth from the *Tomb of Autan* and *Tehanu*, and *the Left Hand of Darkness* comes next. According to Le Guin, gender conflict is the very fundamental source of all the contradictions for human beings, women's roles in her invented fantastic world and the elimination of gender in an androgynous society are for her "thought-experiment" of reflection upon the present patriarchal society. This chapter firstly deals with the parallel development of feminism and science fiction, pointing out that the subordinate positions of women in society and science fiction in literature make the common ground of their alliance. As a feminist critic herself, Le Guin's ideas of women's social role, women writing and gender relations have been discussed along with others important feminist theoretical concepts. From the discussion of the two representative female roles and androgynous society, it surveys Le Guin's idea of androgyny by concluding that by transcending male and female, human can achieve fully Taoist balance of Yin and Yang.

Chapter Two traces the relationship between Utopianism, anarchism and Taoism in *The Dispossessed*. This chapter pushes the study of man-woman individual relationship to the layer of social collective relationship. As the novel's subtitle *An Ambiguous Utopia* indicates, the anarchist society may not be as perfect as an ideal "utopia". With its circular structure, the novel depicts the dichotomous relationship between sequency and simultaneity, individuality and community as well as the ambiguous decentralization. The problems in the anarchist Anarras compared to the metaphoric capitalist Urras are thought-provoking in terms of Taoist political statement of the central ideas of being and non-being, doing and non-doing, circulation and transformation.

The third chapter focuses on Taoism and ecological ideas in Le Guin's two novels *The Lathe of Heaven* and *Always Coming Home* as well as two short stories to study the human-nature relationship. As a relatively new emerged theory and applied critical vision, ecocriticism finds coalition with Taoism with regard to their concerns over the human-nature relationship and the idea of de-anthropocentrism. It probes the

environmental consciousness, the interdependence of human beings and other species and the role of human beings in the world as an ecological system. Taoist ideas of “complying with nature”, balance and transformation all find manifestations here. Furthermore, *Always Coming Home* has some traits of ecofiction and its circular structure tallies with Taoist cyclic concept.

Chapter four is mainly about Le Guin’s involvement with Taoism, especially her translation work of *Tao Te Ching*. Le Guin’s quest for Tao was first and foremost manifested in her literary creation, and gradually steps into philosophical research. Taoist influence and understanding in the western countries is also briefed before analyzing and comparing Le Guin’s version with others and discussing her understandings and major ideas of Taoism. It also gives an overall review of Taoist concepts embodied explicitly or implicitly in Le Guin’s works.

The conclusion part reiterates Le Guin’s contribution to science fiction and fantasy writing. It also puts forward the idea that the intersectionality of Taoism and science fiction and other theoretical approaches is made possible in the postmodernist context, for it is the nature of postmodernism to reject the distinction between high and low forms of art, rigid genre divisions and blur the boundaries of ancient Eastern philosophy and (post)modern Western performance.

Le Guin is a prolific writer. A study of Le Guin’s writing reveals the pattern and configuration which are at the heart of her work. That heart is Taoism. Living in a period of rapid change and search for meaning, she has rediscovered, updated, and brought to our attention the philosophical thoughts of ancient China. When we cross the edge of millennium and look back, Le Guin’s works, though at that time, always unrealistic and imagined for the unknown future or alien world, may provide access to the reexamination of the time and place in which we had been and are being.

Key Words: Taoism; Tao; science fiction; feminism; utopia

摘要

在美国当代作家中，尤其是在科幻小说创作领域，厄秀拉·勒奎恩是绝对不能被忽视的。她生于 1929 年，几十年的创作生涯跨越了两个世纪。勒奎恩的作品文类丰富，包括诗歌、散文、现实小说、科幻小说、儿童文学、青少年文学、电影剧本、文学评论、歌词创作、音频读本等等。迄今为止，她已出版 22 部长篇小说、100 余篇短篇小说（共结集 11 部）、7 部诗集、4 部散文集、12 部儿童文学作品和 4 部译著、4 部文学选集。极少有其他美国作家涉猎如此广泛，成就如此之高。她的作品获奖频多，几乎囊括了国内外科幻文学界所有奖项。除此之外，她还获得美国国家图书奖及多项终生成就奖。著名文学评论家哈罗德·布鲁姆亲自担纲编辑专集评论勒奎恩的代表作《黑暗的左手》，在序言中他写到：“勒奎恩超越了托尔金，远胜于多丽丝·莱辛，想象力丰富，在当代作家中首屈一指”（2）。日本作家村上春树也表示，勒奎恩是他最喜爱的女作家。

《黑暗的左手》（1969）以雌雄同体的描写而引人关注。除此之外，勒奎恩著作甚丰，代表作还包括“地海三部曲”（1968—1972），后扩展成“地海系列”，共计六部奇幻小说，描写具有魔法的年青人的成长故事；乌托邦小说《一无所有》（1974）；关于西海岸的未来史《永远回家》（1985）等等。此外，她还编纂了颇具影响力的《诺顿科幻文学选集》（与布莱恩·阿特伯里合编），翻译了中国古典道家典籍《道德经》（1997）。近年来她依然笔耕不辍，2009 年和 2010 年的两部作品荣获科幻杂志《轨迹》大奖。

在 20 世纪中后期之前，科幻小说在中国的读者并不多，所以勒奎恩这个名字对大多数人来说是陌生的。直到 20 世纪 80 年代，她的一些短篇小说和长篇小说的节选部分才开始出现在中国的科幻杂志上，而她主要作品的中译本直到 21 世纪才出现。但是勒奎恩本人受中国文化浸润已久，她在很小的时候就开始阅读《道德经》，道家思想影响其整个创作生涯。她作品中的主人公大都具有道家思想：他们关注什么是正确的处世态度、小国寡民的彼此关系、无为而治的乌托邦，以及如何与自然和谐相处的价值观等。她的许多作品既是对“道”的解读，也是对“道”的实践。

道家思想成为勒奎恩多部作品中人与人、人与社会、人与自然的关系处理的

基本指导原则。道家思想一方面指引主人公们理解、行动、不断追求平衡与和谐；另一方面，它在作品中与女性主义、生态主义、乌托邦思想交织在一起，使读者有了全新的阅读体验。而本文正是在上述理念观点和体系的背景下，研究勒奎恩数部代表作中的道家思想。

首先，本文简要地介绍了勒奎恩生平及创作，指出她在美国当代文学中的独特地位。在对勒奎恩作品的研究现状做出简明综述后，还探究了作为一种文类的科幻小说的发展历史，从中指出道家思想是贯穿勒奎恩作品的主导思想。

其次，本文以女性主义批评理论为指导，重点研究《苍鹰之眼》、“地海系列”的《古墓》和《特哈努》中的女性角色的觉醒与成长，以及代表作《黑暗的左手》。勒奎恩认为，两性冲突是人类一切矛盾的根源。而其作品中女性角色的定位、她所构筑的雌雄同体世界中对性别的消除，都是她对父权制社会中两性关系的“思想实验”。文章指出，女性在社会中的从属地位与科幻小说在文学中的边缘地位使两者的结盟成为可能。勒奎恩本人作为女性主义评论家，在人物塑造和理论建构上张扬女性主义。从女性的觉醒与成长到性别消融的雌雄同体，勒奎恩超越了两性对立，她所构筑的两性相互转化的社会表达了道家思想中阴阳转化及交融的观点在性别关系上的处理之道。

本文还重点考察了勒奎恩另一代表作《一无所有》中乌托邦思想、无政府主义思想和道家思想的关联。论文研究触角从男女两性的人际关系延伸至社会群体关系，正如小说副标题“一个不确定的乌托邦”所指出的，无政府主义的社会也许并不是完美的“乌托邦”。小说的环形结构中两种不同社会形态即无政府主义与资本主义的冲突和矛盾、继时性与同时性、个人与集体、去中心化的不确定性，都体现了作者对“无为而治”的社会治理方式的思考以及“有无相生”、“循环往复”等道家思想的再现与表达。

勒奎恩在长篇小说《天钩》、《永远回家》及短篇小说集《水牛姑娘》的故事中将此前的人与人、人与社会关系的研究推至人与自然的关系研究，体现了道家思想的生态观。生态批评是近年来兴起的一种文学批评新视角，道家思想中有关于对人与自然关系的论述，与生态批评之“去人类中心化”观点不谋而合。它们张扬环境意识、思考人与其它物种间的相互依存关系，以及人类在作为生态整体系统的地球上如何定位的问题。道家思想中“平衡转化”、“天人合一”的观点正

是其生态观的最终表达，而这一点在可称之为“生态小说”的《永远回家》中表现得淋漓尽致。

此外，本文还重点梳理了道家学说及其在西方的传播与影响，探讨和评述了勒奎恩对《道德经》长达 40 余年的翻译与研究工作。一方面，这充分说明了勒奎恩的“原道之旅”是从文学作品的展现开始，最终走向了哲学精神的探究；另一方面，从勒奎恩的《道德经》译本与其它译本的对比研究中亦可探知她对道家思想及其主要观点的诠释和理解。在后现代语境下，道家学说与科幻小说、与女性主义、乌托邦思想、生态批评观结合是可能的，因为后现代主义的多元内核消除了艺术形式中所谓“高雅”与“低俗”的界限和差异，这就为古老东方哲学的道家思想与西方后现代文学的表达寻找到了共生与共鸣的契合点。

勒奎恩是一个才华横溢而多产的作家，在她的作品中，她试图发现和重塑中国道家哲学思想的现代意义，并使之成为现代人所关注、思考和接受。在跨越千年的门槛之后，勒奎恩作品使我们能穿越时空的过去和未来，在一个非现实的、想象的、未知的世界里重新审视我们曾经走过和正在行走着的路。

关键词： 道家思想；道；科幻小说；女性主义；乌托邦

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